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ABSTRACT

Past research has supported the idea that involvement in extracurricular activities has a positive impact on students' evaluation of their college lives. This study investigated whether involvement, as measured by time commitment to campus activities, had a differential impact on the students' adjustment to various aspects of college life, including their academic performance. Researchers administered a self-report measure of adjustment to 237 college students at a predominantly white, state university. Results showed that males were the primary beneficiaries of involvement in terms of their overall adjustment to college, social adjustment, and attachment (sense of belongingness). These benefits were observed among male students with both moderate and high levels of involvement; no significant differences between the moderate and high involvement groups suggest that involvement at any level will contribute positively to social adjustment and to commitment to attaining academic goals. Males reporting no involvement scored consistently lower on these dimensions. The almost exclusive advantages males enjoyed from involvement might be explained by females relying less on organized activities as a means of adjustment and relying more on personal support networks. No significant relationship was found between academic performance, as measured by grade point averages, and involvement for either gender. Contains 14 references. (RJM)

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**Involvement in Extracurricular Activities
and Adjustment to College**

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RUNNING HEAD: INVOLVEMENT AND ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

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Abstract

Two hundred and thirty-seven college students (89 males and 148 females) participated in a study which investigated the relationship between involvement in campus extracurricular activities and various aspects of adjustment to college life, including actual academic performance measured by grade point averages. The results showed that males were the primary beneficiaries of involvement in terms of their overall adjustment to college, social adjustment, and attachment (sense of belongingness). These benefits were observed among male students with both moderate and high levels of involvement, while those males who reported no involvement scored consistently lower on these dimensions. There was no significant relationship between academic performance as measured by grade point averages and involvement for either gender.

Past research has generally supported the idea that involvement in extracurricular activities has a positive impact on the students' evaluation of their college lives. For example, Astin (1977) found that involvement in various activities such as membership in Greek organizations, honors programs, and ROTC, etc., was positively related to satisfaction with a number of aspects of college life including satisfaction with faculty-student relations and the institution's reputations. The beneficial impact of involvement in Greek organizations was also shown in the studies of Abrahamowicz (1988) and Pennington, Zvonkovic, and Wilson (1989). Similarly, athletic participation was shown to be instrumental in enhancing the participants' satisfaction with college experience and motivation to strive for the attainment of their educational goals (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Ryan, 1989). When involvement was defined broadly and its measures included various aspects of students' interaction with their peers, the benefits of involvement were found to be quite encompassing and extensive (Astin, 1993). Active participation in peer interactions of various forms (e.g., working on group projects, participating in intramural sports, being a member of a Greek organization, serving in a student office, socializing, etc.) was shown to have a positive impact on self-reported measures of academic development such as the acquisition of general knowledge and analytical and critical thinking skills. More objective

indicators of academic performance such as college GPA and graduation with honors also showed a positive relationship with the above-mentioned composite measure of involvement. There were also indications that active involvement was related to students' satisfaction with social life and certain aspects of their emotional well-being (Astin, 1993).

It appears then that past research in this area has established an overall positive impact of involvement in various types of activities on college experience. However, there are still a number of questions that have not been fully examined in these studies.

First, there is a dearth of information regarding the nature of the relationship between involvement and satisfaction. Although it is conceivable that excessive levels of involvement may be counterproductive (Astin, 1984), this possibility could not be ascertained in the studies in which involvement was treated as a dichotomous variable (e.g., Abrahamowicz, 1988; Ryan, 1989). In the present study, involvement was measured by the number of hours per week a student devoted to a variety of campus organizations and activities.

Secondly, with regard to the criterion variable, previous studies tended to utilize either global attitudinal measures (e.g., Abrahamowicz, 1988; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Ryan, 1989) or measures that assessed the student's evaluation of specific aspects of his/her college experience (e.g., Astin, 1977;

Pennington et al., 1989). With the exception of a few large-scale studies (e.g., Astin, 1993), not enough effort has been expended to conceptualize the student's adjustment to or satisfaction with college life as a multidimensional construct. Thus, the question of whether the beneficial impact of involvement is uniform across various domains of college life has not been fully explored. It is quite conceivable that, while the students' satisfaction with their social life may benefit from high levels of involvement, their perceived or actual ability to meet academic demands may not. The present study examined the impact of involvement on various aspects of the students' adjustment to college life including their academic performance as measured by grade point averages. Published reports on how various types of involvement might affect grades have been minimal and available data are either only suggestive (Harnett, 1965) or inconsistent (Bean & Bradley, 1986). While Pascarella and Smart (1991) reported a modest but positive impact of intercollegiate athletic participation on college grades for Caucasian males, findings reported by Astin (1993) indicated that involvement in such activities had an adverse impact on the students' performance on a number of standardized tests.

Thirdly, in spite of the massive investigation of gender differences in many areas of human behavior during the past several decades, systematic inquiries into possible gender differences in the beneficial impact of involvement have been

scarce. The present study examined such possible gender differences.

In summary, the present study investigated whether involvement, as measured by time commitment to campus activities, had a differential impact on the students' adjustment to various aspects of college life, including their actual academic performance. In addition, it investigated whether the impact of involvement showed any gender differences.

Method

Subjects

Two hundred thirty seven college students (89 males and 148 females) at a medium size, predominantly white State University in the Mid-Atlantic region participated in the study. These students were enrolled in several sections of an introductory level health and physical education course or introductory psychology course. The subjects received extra credit for their participation. The mean age of the sample was 19.26 years ($SD=1.20$).

Instruments

Measures of Adjustment. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989), a self-report measure of adjustment to college with four subscales, was used. The academic adjustment scale contains 24 items that measure how well the student believes he/she is meeting academic demands and include such items as "I have been keeping up to date on my

academic work," "I am finding academic work at college difficult," and, "My academic goals and purposes are well defined," etc. The social adjustment scale consists of 20 items that measure how satisfied the student is with the social aspects of the college and contains items such as "I have several close ties at college," and "I am having difficulty feeling at ease with other people at college," and, "I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways that I don't like," etc. The 15-item personal-emotional scale assesses the student's psychological and physical well-being with the items, "I have been feeling tense or nervous lately," "Lately I have been blue and moody a lot," and, "My appetite has been good lately," etc. The fourth subscale, the attachment scale also contains 15 items that measure the degree to which the student feels committed to education and remaining in the college he/she is attending. Items such as "I expect to stay at college for a bachelor's degree," "I wish I were at another college or university," and, "I am pleased now about my decision to go to college." make up this scale. All items were rated on a 9-point scale ranging from "applies very closely to me (+1)" to "doesn't apply to me at all (+9)." The scoring key was reversed for the negatively worded items so that lower scores consistently represented higher levels of adjustment.

Previous research on the internal consistency of the SACQ has reported alpha coefficients of the following range (ranges?):

.81 to .90 for the academic adjustment scale, .83 to .91 for the social adjustment scale, .77 to .86 for the personal-emotional adjustment scale, and .85 to .91 for the attachment scale, and, .92 to .95 for the full scale, respectively (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Measures of Involvement and Academic Performance. For the involvement measure, subjects were asked to list all on-campus extracurricular activities (clubs, organizations, student offices, teams, associations, etc.) that they were involved in on a regular basis and/or that required a time commitment. These activities had to meet one additional requirement that subjects not be remunerated for their participation. For each activity they listed, subjects were instructed to estimate the approximate number of hours per week they devoted to it. The total number of hours per week they devoted to activities then served as the measure of involvement.

For the measure of actual academic performance, grade point averages of those subjects who signed a release form were obtained from the registrar's office. Of the 237 subjects who participated in the survey, 192 subjects (73 males and 119 females) consented to the release of their grade point averages.

Procedure

Students who volunteered for participation by signing on the informed consent form were given a survey at approximately middle point of a semester. The survey was designed to assess

various aspects of student life including their participation in extracurricular activities. The survey also contained the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. At the conclusion of the survey, they were asked whether they would consent to the release of their grade point averages. For those who signed for the release of that information, grade point averages were obtained from the Registrar's office.

Results

Data Analyses

Due to the large number of subjects (108 subjects) who reported no time commitment, the distribution of the involvement scores showed a rather severe deviation from a normal distribution. Since the gross deviation from normality of the involvement scores rendered inappropriate the use of these scores as the predictor of the students' adjustment in regression analysis, these scores were instead used to classify the subjects into three groups according to their levels of involvement. Those who reported zero hours of commitment were classified as the No Involvement group (n=108; 35 males and 73 females). For those who reported involvement in terms of actual time commitment, the (a) median-split procedure was used for classification. The median was approximately 6.5 hours per week; however, since no subjects used fraction in their answers, 7 hours per week was used as the cutoff; those who reported involvement of up to 7 hours per week (n=69; 22 males and 47

females) were classified as the Moderate Involvement group and those whose involvement exceeded 7 hours per week were classified as the High Involvement group ($n=60$; 32 males and 28 females), respectively. A series of 2 (Gender) $\times$ 3 (Involvement Level) analyses of variance (ANOVA) were then performed on the four adjustment scores and GPA's.

Impact of Involvement on Academic Adjustment

The ANOVA did not reveal any significant main effect of Gender or Involvement on academic adjustment. The interaction was also nonsignificant. Subjects with differing levels of involvement in on-campus activities reported comparable levels of academic adjustment and this pattern held true for both genders.

Impact of Involvement on Social Adjustment

In the case of subjects' social adjustment, a significant main effect of Involvement, $F(2, 231) = 15.52, p < .001$ was observed. Since a significant interaction effect between Gender and Involvement, $F(2, 231) = 3.38, p = .04$, was also observed, analyses of simple main effects were performed. Table 1 shows the means and the standard deviations of the social adjustment scores for each group, respectively.

Insert Table 1 about here

Simple main effects of Involvement were significant for both males, $F(2, 86) = 16.92, p < .0001$, and females, $F(2, 145) =$

3.32, $p = .04$. The comparison of group means with the Newman-Keuls procedure revealed the following: Among males, those in the Moderate and High Involvement groups reported significantly higher levels of social adjustment (all p 's $< .05$) than those in the No Involvement group. The Moderate and High Involvement groups did not show significant difference. Among females, the only significant difference was observed between the High and No Involvement groups in that highly involved subjects scored significantly higher on social adjustment ($p < .05$) than those with no involvement.

The simple main effects of Gender were not significant at any level (all levels?) of Involvement; that is, the gender difference in social adjustment was not significant at any level of Involvement. There was a tendency for the females with No Involvement to report higher levels of social adjustment than their male counterparts, $F(1, 106) = 2.80$, while, among those with High Involvement, males tended to score higher than females, $F(1, 58) = 3.20$. However, these effects did not reach statistical significance (all p 's $< .10$).

In summary, the main sources of the significant interaction was the higher social adjustment reported by: i) the males in the two Involvement groups compared to those males with No Involvement, and, ii) the females in the High Involvement compared to those females with No Involvement.

Impact of Involvement on Personal-Emotional Adjustment

With regard to personal-emotional adjustment (psychological and physical well-being), no significant main effect or interaction effect was observed.

Impact of Involvement on Attachment

The results of the ANOVA on the attachment scores closely parallel those on social adjustment scores described above. Both a significant main effect of Involvement, $F(2, 231) = 7.19, p = .001$, and a significant interaction between Gender and Involvement, $F(2, 231) = 4.49, p = .01$, were observed. Table 2 shows the means and the standard deviations of attachment scores for each group.

Insert Table 2 about here

Analyses of simple main effects of Involvement for each Gender revealed the following; for males, there was a strong effect of involvement on attachment, $F(2, 86) = 13.49, p < .0001$. A subsequent means comparison using the Newman-Keuls procedure indicated that males in both the Moderate and High Involvement groups showed higher levels of attachment to school than males with No Involvement (all p 's $< .05$). Again, males in the two involvement groups did not differ in their attachment. For females, there was no significant difference between the three levels of involvement in terms of attachment.

In terms of Gender differences within each Involvement level, the results again bore resemblance to those obtained for social adjustment. Among those with No Involvement, there was a statistically nonsignificant tendency for females to express more attachment than males, $F(1, 106) = 3.04, p < .10$. However, among those with Moderate Involvement, this tendency was reversed, and, males showed a tendency for higher attachment, $F(1, 106) = 2.83, p < .10$. At the High Involvement level, this tendency for males to show greater attachment than females was even more pronounced and reached statistical significance, $F(1, 58) = 3.98, p = .05$.

In summary, the main sources of the significant interaction effect were: i) greater attachment reported by the males in the two Involvement groups compared to the males with No Involvement, and, ii) greater attachment reported by the males in the High Involvement than the females with High Involvement.

Involvement and GPA

Consistent with the results obtained with regard to academic adjustment, neither Involvement nor Gender showed a significant main effect or an interaction effect on grade point averages.

Summary & Discussion

The results of the present study confirmed general findings of the existing research literature regarding the positive that involvement in extracurricular activities plays in the life of college students. In addition, the present study shed light on a

few questions raised at the outset of the study.

First, involvement appears to provide benefits primarily in the areas of social adjustment and attachment (the sense of belongingness), but, not in academic aspects of college life. On the one hand, this can be taken as a limitation in the beneficial impact of involvement. On the other hand, this can be seen as a rather resounding endorsement of extracurricular activities in that involvement in these activities, even at high levels, does not seem to adversely affect academic performance as measured by grade point averages. It should be noted that the treatment of the involvement variable as a categorical one in the present study (prompted by the severe lack of normality of the involvement scores) would make it difficult to ascertain whether there exists a truly linear relationship between involvement and various aspects of adjustment to college life. However, within the limits of the present study, there does not seem to be a case for excessive involvement as Astin (1984) speculated.

While there seems to be convergence in the research findings regarding the positive role that involvement plays in the social and emotional lives of college students, the impact that involvement in extracurricular activities has on the student's academic life is yet to be clarified. Contrary to the earlier report by Pascarella and Smart (1991), Astin (1993) documented a negative impact that participation in intercollegiate athletics had on certain indices of academic achievement such as

performance on standardized tests. Also, in contrast to the findings of the present study (i.e., no relationship between involvement and academic adjustment or performance), Astin (1993) reported on the positive role of participation in clubs and organizations when "academic/cognitive development" was broadly defined to include certain academically relevant skills such as speaking ability. Meaningful integration of such diverse findings would require a careful analysis of the nature of involvement itself (e.g., the type of activities engaged) and of the criterion measures used.

A number of interesting gender differences in the impact of involvement on adjustment were observed. Males were the primary beneficiaries of involvement in that the social adjustment, and attachment of males in both the Moderate and High involvement groups were significantly higher than those of their male counterpart with No Involvement. No significant differences between the Moderate and High involvement groups suggest that involvement at any level will contribute positively to social adjustment, a sense of belongingness, and commitment to attaining academic goals of males. The only benefit the females reaped from involvement was shown in the higher social adjustment scores of High Involvement females compared to those in No Involvement group.

The benefits of involvement enjoyed by males were also observed when the social adjustment and attachment scores of the

two genders were compared at each level of involvement; although females with No Involvement tended to show higher levels of social adjustment and attachment than the males with No Involvement, males tended to gain advantage as their involvement level increased. This advantage was particularly pronounced in terms of the strong attachment shown by the males with High Involvement. Although these differences did not reach statistical significance except for the difference in attachment between males and females with High Involvement, the overall pattern is very consistent with the general findings of the study.

The almost exclusive monopoly that the males in the present study had on the benefits of involvement is a little surprising in light of the significance of intimate relationships in women's life as reported in the gender-role development literature (Bem, 1974; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985). A possible explanation for this finding would be that, although establishment of supportive relationships are still more important for females than males, females may rely less on organized activities as a means of establishing and maintaining such relationships and have a more personal support network that contributes to their adjustment. Support for this explanation can be found in the importance of shared interests and activities in males' friendships (Bell, 1981) and also men's reliance on group-oriented criteria in evaluating loneliness while women tend to

emphasize the qualities of dyadic relationships (Stokes & Levin, 1986).

Future research may be directed towards investigating gender differences in the functional values of various activities and in the manner in which these activities are carried out. In addition, future endeavors in this area could add to the existing knowledge base by examining whether and how different types of activities may hinder or facilitate various aspects of the development (e.g., career) in the two genders after graduation from college.

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Table 1

Social Adjustment Scores: Cell Means and Standard Deviations

	INVOLVEMENT			ROW MEANS
	NONE	MODERATE	HIGH	
MALE	85.49 (25.32)	65.36 (21.26)	54.50 (18.58)	69.37 (25.79)
FEMALE	77.40 (22.61)	72.87 (26.50)	63.82 (21.79)	73.39 (24.14)
COLUMN MEANS	80.02 (23.71)	70.48 (25.04)	58.85 (20.51)	71.88 (G) (24.79)

Note. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Lower scores indicate higher social adjustment.

Table 2

Attachment Scores: Cell Means and Standard Deviations

	INVOLVEMENT			ROW MEANS
	NONE	MODERATE	HIGH	
MALE	55.31	40.50	36.63	44.93
	(18.32)	(13.47)	(12.97)	(17.47)
FEMALE	49.16	48.60	44.50	48.10
	(16.59)	(20.55)	(17.50)	(18.06)
COLUMN MEANS	51.16	46.01	40.30	46.91 (G)
	(17.33)	(18.88)	(15.63)	(17.87)

Notes. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Lower scores indicate higher attachment.